

The whole assembly of the Lord says: How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the Lord and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now? Was not the sin or Peor enough for us? Up to this very day we have not cleansed ourselves from that sin, even though a plague fell on the community of the Lord! Are you now turning away from the Lord?

If you rebel against the Lord today, tomorrow he will be angry with the whole community of Israel. If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the Lord's land, where the Lord's tabernacle stands, and share the land with us. But do not rebel against the Lord or against us by building an altar for yourselves, other than the altar of the Lord our God. When Achan, Son of Zerah, acted unfaithfully regarding the devoted things, did not wrath come upon the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who died for his sin. (verses 16-20)

Here is an example of a straightforward verbal confrontation. Even though those confronted were not guilty, the open, honest approach by Phinehas helped to clear the air. There are several principles implicit in this speech that are worthy of note.

a. Phinehas spoke on behalf of the "whole assembly." He or his father Eleazer could have taken the supposed apostasy of the two and one-half tribes as a personal affront. Throughout this discourse, Phinehas shows concern for the honor of the Lord's Name and the welfare of His people.

In interpersonal conflicts, there is a tendency toward self-defense and self-vindication. It is an important rule of thumb to think of how the conflict will effect the whole congregation. There are times when it is better to suffer personal hurt without responding defensively if such an action could contribute to the maintenance of unity and the good of the greater number. Contrawise, there are also times when neglecting to confront someone who is evidently doing wrong could be detrimental to the many.